

# MUNICIPAL LIBRARY





Dedicated to  
Mrs Francis Ball  
Member of the Board and Friend of the library  
since 1935



## History of Belle Glade Municipal Library 1927-1967

The history of Belle Glade Municipal Library is to be found for the most part in a study of events, projects, and developments which have occurred during the past forty years. Unlike most historians who look for materials in the dusty annals of parchment, this search for a knowledgeable history has been restricted to original sources, and for the most part, living sources.

Often one source does not agree with another, but in all such instances what has appeared to be the most reliable information has been used.

A predominant factor in the early history of the library was the work of many progressive, civic minded residents of this area. Although few in number, these people worked hard and steadily to help promote a free public library. This attitude, prevalent in 1927, is still very much in evidence in 1967 and reflects the cultural growth of the community which at one time was considered as a "last frontier" and inaccessible to the average traveler.

Undaunted by hurricanes, floods, and freezes, residents of Belle Glade consider these "acts of nature" as just mere interruptions which have not deterred them from reaching a goal ..... namely, a free public library.

A start on the library, small as it was, came about in 1926 or 1927 only a short time before the destructive



hurricanes. A Colonel Harbison, engaged in farming here, donated a bookcase filled with books (exact numbers not known) which was installed in the Reidel Hotel. Most of these volumes were destroyed during the 1928 hurricane, but the bookcase was saved. One might remember the song so popular in that era, "The Song is Ended, But the Melody Lingers On"..... in this instance the bookcase which is still in existence.

Following the hurricane, the bookcase filled with donated books, was set up in an army tent furnished by the American Red Cross for use by residents as a Recreation Center. In 1929 the Greater Palm Beach Athletic Club raised money to furnish "Books for Juveniles". It was also during this same year that through the efforts of Mrs. Virgil Chandler, 500 elementary level books were placed in the center. All of these books were circulated among residents of the area and records kept.

In 1929, following completion of the city hall, the city fathers authorized the use of a small room off the main floor for setting up a library. The Woman's Club was asked to assume the responsibility of all books, and to take charge of cataloguing for circulation to residents of towns around the lake including Belle Glade, South Bay, Pahokee and Canal Point. Mrs. J. F. (Etta) Browne graciously consented to take charge of this project and was assisted by ladies from the adjoining towns in repairing and classifying the books, numbering 500. Among the many helpers who worked tirelessly were Mrs. Adams Daams and Mrs. Thomas Brigger from Everglades Experiment Station and Mrs. L. J. Barstow of South Bay.

In 1932 and 1933 the Woman's Club and Garden Club



decided that a worthwhile project would be to erect a small civic building in the city park, now known as McDonald Park. During the fall of 1933 all the books now totaling 800, were transferred to the Woman's Club building. Again the ladies of the community spent many hours in mending, classifying, and shelving these volumes. As a further incentive toward the promotion of letter reading, the Woman's Club as a body voted to join the Book of the Month Club, thus being assured of at least one new and unused book for placement on the library shelf each month.

Mrs. Brown was retained as city librarian in 1935 and kept the library open four hours each week. Later, with additional financial assistance from the city, the library stayed open longer.

The WPA entered the picture in 1942 and paid a librarian to keep the library open for thirty hours each week. When the WPA was discontinued, the Woman's Club offered the library and its contents consisting of 3000 volumes to the City of Belle Glade as a gift. The city agreed to accept the offer and assumes the responsibility for maintenance and upkeep of the library. This was another step toward a free public library which is one of the vital needs of every community.

During the intervening years members of the Library Board worked constantly toward adding more and more reading materials for adults and youths of this area. Mrs. Brown was retained as librarian until 1948 at which time she retired.

In 1948 Mrs. Bettie Harris the present librarian was employed by the city. Her services during the past years



have been excellent and greatly appreciated by all subscribers to our library. She has a vast knowledge of the work she so dearly loves and has always remained her same sweet self regardless of the many adversities she has encountered.

In 1958 the city appropriated five thousand dollars to be used for renovation of a building at 100 West Canal Street. Again the library and its contents were moved to this location.

Now in this year of 1967 more than twelve thousand volumes have been moved and classified, catalogued and shelved into our new eighty thousand dollar building in the city park.



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